



# 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer

**Special Report:**  
**Brands and Social Media**

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# Memo to Brands: Please Fix Social Media

**Richard Edelman** President and CEO



@RichardWEdelman

Brands have become the new hope for consumers battered by populism, rapid change, and societal discontent. Brands are an alternative democracy because consumers feel they can vote with their wallet or cellphone and can control their relationship with a brand more easily than dealing with a polarized, paralyzed government. There is a new expectation that brands will take on issues that matter, from racial discrimination to sustainability, and consumers believe brands can do more to solve them than government can.\* Social media is now one of the most pressing issues of our time.

For the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity we have conducted a special nine-country Edelman Trust Barometer study on social media, the latest chapter in our 18-year inquiry into trust in institutions. We learned that there is a serious lack of confidence in social media in all regions of the world. This is a cry from the heart; people are scared. They are outraged about the violation of their privacy, and uncertain about the truth because of the plague of fake news.

In the past few months, people's concerns about social media have metastasized with the revelations of privacy violations by Cambridge Analytica; evidence of Russia-produced fake news undermining the electoral process in the U.S., U.K., Italy, and Germany; and new scrutiny of data-sharing partnerships between platforms and top device makers, made without users' consent. ABC Entertainment felt it had to fire Roseanne Barr and cancel her sitcom because of her racist tweet. The 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer in January showed trust in social media at 41 percent globally, with drops across most Western countries from the previous year, plummeting 11 points in the U.S. The U.K. is at just 24 percent trust.

Our new study tells us why. The specific concerns are fake news and privacy. Only 40 percent trust that social media platforms will address fake news and hate speech (28 percent in the U.K., 34 percent in the U.S.). Sixty percent told us that they do not trust social media platforms to behave responsibly with user data. Forty percent said they have deleted at least one social media account

\* Source: 2017 Edelman Earned Brand Study

in the past year because they did not trust the platform to treat personal information properly. And nearly two-thirds (62 percent) said that they want government to play a stronger role in regulating social media.

Consumers want brands to act on the problem because they understand that the power of the advertiser exceeds that of the individual. Seventy percent of respondents told us that they expect brands to pressure platforms to address fake news and protect users from offensive content. A similar percentage told us they count on brands to get social media to defend their personal data. And the platforms are responding; Facebook has recently launched a new transparency initiative for political advertisements that unveils the buyer of the space and the amount spent on the campaign.

There is a real risk of this issue contaminating the marketing ecosystem. Consumers are now challenging all data-related marketing techniques, even long-accepted practices such as loyalty programs. There is only 11 percent favorability of monitoring life events such as birth or marriage, with 57 percent either viewing it unfavorably or even terming it illegal. A majority of those surveyed (54 percent) are uncomfortable with

marketers tracking purchases in stores to target them. Even the use of cookies to customize advertisements is viewed unfavorably by most respondents.

Consumers don't want to give up on social media – it has become a crucial partner in their lives. But they want a New Deal with the platforms. Be transparent with me about what you are doing, including clear identification of sponsorship. Give me control over my purchase data and my demographics, with explicit privacy options at each step. Offer me information that I can believe and protect me from noxious content. Give me a public place to talk back to you, and I will then hold you accountable for substantive change.

People expect brands today to have values, not just a value proposition. That's why consumers are counting on brands to preserve social media and to protect them from exploitation. Brands and social media platforms must treat consumers as an equal partner in solving the problem. Give power back to consumers, and they'll give you their trust and their business. Help fix social media so that consumers can again trust what they love.



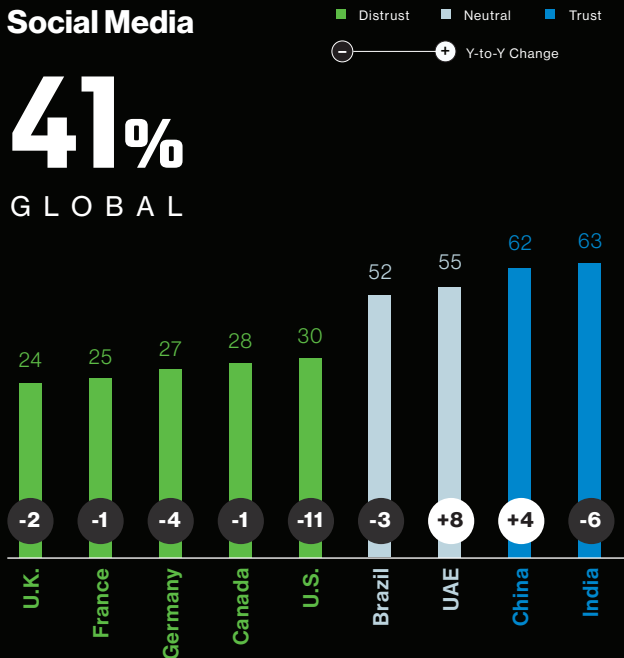
# How Trusted Is Social Media?

Around the world, people's trust in social media is much lower than their trust in traditional media and search engines. People in developing countries are much more trusting of social media than people in Western countries.

## Social Media

# 41%

GLOBAL



## Traditional Media

# 66%

GLOBAL

## Search Engines

# 63%

GLOBAL

Percent trust in social media platforms, and change 2017-18

Source: January 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer

# The Top 5 Concerns

**Identity theft & scams**

**Cyberbullying & hate speech**

**Fake news**

**Clickbait**

**Bots**

How much have these concerns damaged your trust in social media?

**73%**

Brazil

**72%**

Canada

**67%**

U.K.

**67%**

India

**67%**

UAE

**66%**

U.S.

**65%**

Germany

**64%**

France

**64%**

China

## People First

Steve Rubel Chief Content Strategist

@SteveRubel

For years, social media was unquestionably a force for good. It empowered billions to express themselves. And it connected institutions and individuals like nothing before it. But somewhere along the way, social media lost the plot. Some of this is the platforms' fault. They stretched far beyond the core. However, marketers are equally complicit. They treated too many of us like barcodes instead of human beings. And now the ground is polluted. Social media can again become a force for good. But it will require that platforms and marketers preserve what makes it unique – humanity – more so than data.

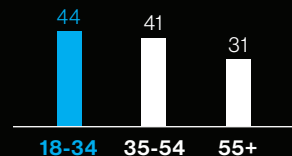
**60%** don't trust

social media companies to behave responsibly with the information they collect about me

**40%** deleted

at least one social media account in the past year, because they didn't trust it to treat their personal information properly

**Younger people are more likely to delete social media accounts.**



# Benefits for Brands

Social media is at the heart of the consumer-brand relationship. Consumers find direct communication with brands to be more believable, are open to a range of interactions with brands, and feel that they can form stronger emotional bonds with brands on social platforms.

## For me, social media is the best media channel to:



Discover or hear about a new brand or product for the first time



Most often see and hear things that lead me to fall in love with a brand



Most often see and hear things that lead me to fall out of love with a brand

These are true even among people who use social media weekly or less. (People were asked to choose among traditional, search, social, owned, and online-only media.)

## To reach people like me, brands should use social media to:

**60%**

Deliver customer service

**51%**

Introduce new products

**45%**

Advertise products

**44%**

Give people the opportunity to interact directly with the brand

**43%**

Communicate purpose and values



## Which do you believe is more likely to give you the truth?

**41%**

What a brand says in its advertising

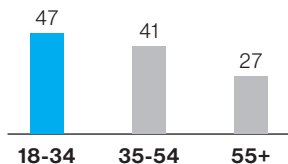
**59%**

What a brand says in direct communications with you

**39%**

are unlikely to become emotionally attached to a brand unless they interact and communicate with it on social media

**Using social media to connect with brands is even more essential for younger people.**



### The Medium Matters

**Carol Potter** President & CEO, EMEA

Brands are playing a very different role in our lives than they used to. We expect so much more of them and they in turn desire a much deeper and richer relationship with us. Social media and the conversations it facilitates are at the very heart of these changing dynamics. It's a unique space where the consumer-brand bond can spark, blossom, and grow.

Our study shows that consumers value this direct connection with brands and, for a sizeable audience, social media has become an essential way of emotionally interacting with a brand. Indeed, it is now hard to imagine life as a brand without social media.

But trust remains the core foundation of a brand, and the medium it uses to communicate must also carry that trust with it. We need social media, but we also need to be able to trust it.

# Risks and Expectations for Brands

There are a number of watchouts for brands on social media. It may seem surprising that people think the purchases of third-party data by brands – a common practice for decades – should be illegal. But repeated exposures of personal data by large companies have put a new spotlight on privacy measures and all data collection.

## Privacy

Protection of privacy and personal information is one of the most important responsibilities for business, or an issue business must help solve

## Adjacent Content

It is a brand's own fault if its advertising appears next to hate speech or violent or sexually inappropriate content on web pages

## Third-Party Data

It should be illegal for brands to buy your personal information from other companies you do business with

83%

48%

39%

Around the world, people have high expectations that brands will put pressure on social media companies to make their platforms safer, provide more credible information, and operate with integrity.

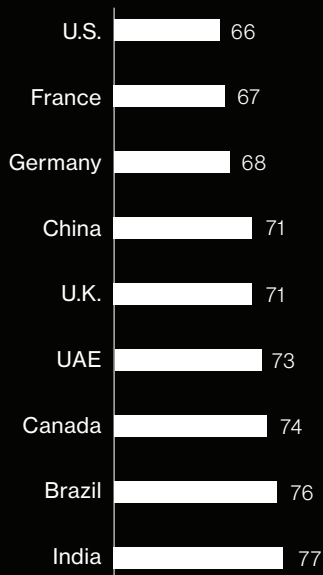
### Do you agree that brands should pressure social media to...

...ensure personal data is protected and used ethically?

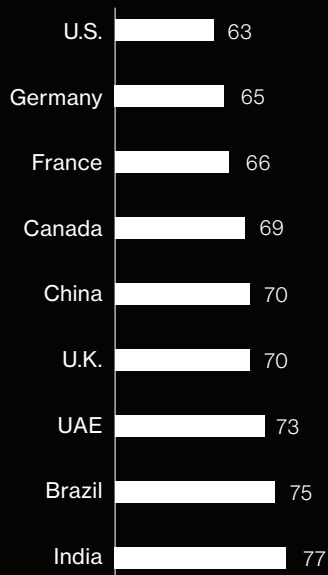
...do more about false information and fake news?

...protect users from offensive/harmful content?

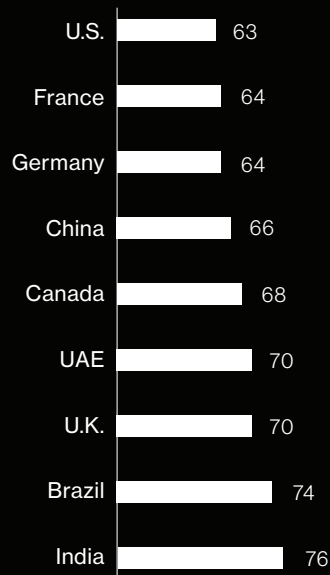
**71%** GLOBAL



**70%** GLOBAL



**68%** GLOBAL





# Brands Must Act

**Mark Renshaw** Global Brand Chair

@MarkRenshaw

Have brands gone too far with using people's data and technology, or not far enough? Are brands conscious of this issue, and do they need a conscience?

Technology in marketing has provided brands with more information about people than most companies can deal with. Privacy policies are those things you click past, without really reading or understanding. But what do people really want brands to do to maintain their trust?

While brands have focused on creating content and connecting with communities, have they lost their conscience? Brand purposes guide many brands on what they do deliberately, but what about the unintentional consequences of marketing on a particular advertising tech platform, or appearing near specific content?

Where is your brand as it relates to being conscious of these associations and actions? Without a conscience to guide more than just content and context, social media and brands will lose trust.

Brands need to have more than a purpose – they need a conscience. They need to help rebuild trust on the social platforms they live on. Brands and social platforms need to be “in this together.”

We recommend that brands take action in three critical areas:

# 1

## Give people a better deal for their data

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Consumers are feeling ripped off and brands need to give them a better, more transparent and more direct deal. Let's move beyond privacy policies being legal safeguards, and ensure a clear value exchange exists for people, brands and data.

### Better value exchange

49% say they are not willing to sacrifice some of their data privacy in return for a more personalized shopping experience.

### Clearer data policies

58% say it is often difficult to understand which information they are giving platforms or applications access to or permission to collect and use.

# 2

## Create trusted content on social media

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Brands must lead in the fight for truth. This means being at the forefront of creating credible, quality content distributed on social media.

People cited these content attributes as most important when they decide whether to trust content they see on social media:

**65%**

Quality of the writing or visuals

**63%**

Author's credentials or expertise

**58%**

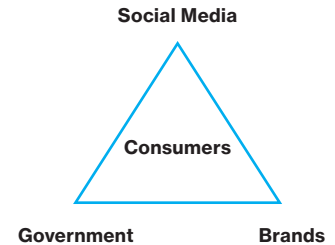
Content is well-designed and looks formal

# 3

## Join forces to build trust in social media

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While there are billions of social media users, they don't feel empowered alone to drive the kind of change that builds trust.



Brands need to use their leverage and purchase power to lead a coalition of government and consumers, along with social media, to drive change for the common good.

## Methodology

The 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer is the firm's 18<sup>th</sup> annual trust and credibility survey. Research was conducted by Edelman Intelligence, a global insight and analytics consultancy.

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### **Special Report: Brands and Social Media**

Online survey in nine countries:  
Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany,  
India, UAE, U.K., and U.S.

1,000 respondents in each country

All fieldwork conducted between  
April 16 and April 30, 2018

### **2018 Edelman Trust Barometer**

Online survey in 28 countries

33,000+ respondents total

All fieldwork conducted between  
October 28 and November 20, 2017

## About Edelman

Edelman is a leading global communications marketing firm that partners with many of the world's largest and emerging businesses and organizations, helping them evolve, promote and protect their brands and reputations. Among its many honors, the firm was awarded the Cannes Lions Grand Prix for PR, named one of 2018 "Agencies to Watch" by Advertising Age and "Global Agency of the Year" by both The Holmes Report and PRWeek, and cited five times by Glassdoor as one of the "Best Places to Work." Edelman owns specialty firms Edelman Intelligence (research) and United Entertainment Group (entertainment, sports, lifestyle).

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